

Adolescent Well Visit Report

Adolescent well visits: Identifying awareness, knowledge, barriers and motivation

Focus Groups with Teens and Parents

Prepared June 2016

Background

Adolescence is a period of significant physical, behavioral and emotional growth. Therefore, it is a crucial time for preventive interventions in both a public health and clinical context.

Unfortunately, adolescents have historically been the least likely to participate in preventive well visits. Examination of their knowledge, understanding, awareness and value of these services is an important step to increase participation in preventive services. Due to their status as minors, it is also beneficial to understand parents' views to optimize preventive care services to adolescent populations.

Purpose of the project

This study aimed to identify parent and adolescent levels of awareness about adolescent well visits, their level of knowledge about what happens during these visits, and the barriers and motivators for receiving them.

Methods

Two focus groups were held with parents of adolescents (n=16), and 2 groups were held with adolescents and young adults (n=23). The focus group protocol was geared towards understanding knowledge and awareness that both groups have about adolescent well visits. The protocol also had questions that sought to understand what the barriers and facilitators were for going to well visits. Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed, and broad themes were identified.

Parental experience with healthcare providers and adolescent well visits

Parents took their teens to the doctor for specific reasons, which included TB tests for pre-employment screenings, the flu, broken bones, physicals for sports or camp, and chronic illnesses such as diabetes. Parents did not seem to be aware of the differences between a sports physical, a visit to get immunizations, or a well visit for adolescents.

“My oldest, he never went. He didn’t need shots, he was healthy.”

Teen experiences with healthcare providers and adolescent well visits

Most teens believed that a specific health need was required for an appointment with their healthcare provider and listed kidney infections, injuries, allergy shots, mental health, medication refills, strep throat, STDs, birth control and chronic conditions as reasons for going. They pointed out that those who were sexually active should see a doctor more frequently and thought that girls should visit their healthcare provider more often than boys. These teens estimated that around 0-5% of their peers received annual well visits.

Do parents value adolescent well visits?

Every parent mentioned that adolescent well visits do not happen regularly. They indicated that one of the benefits of a well visit was establishing a “baseline” of health for the teen, so that future ailments would be easily detected. Along with earlier diagnosis, some parents admitted that diabetes was more prevalent among youth and saw the benefit in preventive care that well visits provided, especially regarding education about nutrition and obesity. Another benefit of well visits was setting a precedent for their children to get regular care rather than going to a healthcare provider only when they were sick. With consistent well visits, parents believed that teens could ask their healthcare provider questions and

become more comfortable in doing so, especially if they are reluctant to share information with their parents. In fact, parents mentioned that healthcare providers who know the family well would understand how the parents feel when talking about sensitive subjects. Even though the majority of parents were comfortable with their healthcare provider talking to their teen about drugs, alcohol, birth control and STIs, some thought that this should be discussed at home, not with a healthcare provider. Others echoed that the healthcare provider should reiterate what is being discussed at home because it could be more effective coming from someone other than the parents. The table below describes the most important topics healthcare providers should discuss with teens as identified by parents and teens. These topics are listed in order of significance.

Top Topics Healthcare Providers Should Discuss With Teens	
According to Teens	According to Parents
Diet/Nutrition	Diet/Nutrition
Exercise/Sports	Exercise/Sports
Substance Abuse/Alcohol/Drugs	Physical Changes of Puberty
STDs	STDs
Physical Changes of Puberty	Substance Abuse/Alcohol/Drugs
Violence Prevention	School Performance
Eating Disorders	Birth Control
Birth Control	Bullying
School Performance	Eating Disorders
Other	Violence Prevention
Bullying	Other

Do teens value adolescent well visits?

Some teens saw the importance of going to their healthcare provider regularly for chronic illnesses, but others did not prioritize well visits. Some mentioned that it was pointless to go if a person was generally healthy. Nevertheless, teens admitted that a well visit could be beneficial because they do not know everything about their bodies.

“I’m already healthy.”

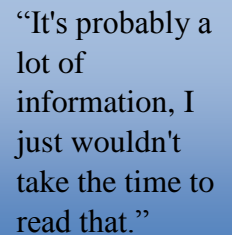
What are barriers to adolescent well visits?

Barriers to adolescent well visits for parents included a poor understanding of what a well visit was and confusion about insurance coverage. Other issues that prevented attendance for well visits were taking time off of work and scheduling with the healthcare provider, especially for those who lived in rural areas and had to drive a long distance. Teens identified barriers included fear of the healthcare provider and immunizations and concern about confidentiality regarding topics like sex, drugs and alcohol. Finally, finding time and transportation to go while coordinating with their parents’ work schedule, and never seeing their parents have well visits were also barriers.

Recommendations made by parents and teens:

- Teens believed that confidentiality should be respected and left up to the teen. Some parents were concerned that healthcare providers would communicate with their teen about issues they were not comfortable with. They preferred to see the same healthcare provider each time in order to build a rapport, which allowed the healthcare provider to learn what the parents preferred as far as sharing information with the parent and the teen.
- Parents suggested making adolescent well checks a school requirement or providing information about it in the school registration packet as a reminder.

- Teens wanted to know that they could talk to their healthcare provider about more than just physical health and wanted to see messages emphasizing not to be embarrassed to be honest about their health with their healthcare provider. Similarly, parents liked materials that emphasized physical and mental health, body image, nutrition, self-esteem, and stress in school.
- Parents wanted more education on what a well visit is and what it entails. They recommended that information be provided about the fact that it is a comprehensive visit, allowing more time with the healthcare provider.
- Parents also shared that they did not go for well visits annually themselves. Educating parents about the importance of well visits and encouraging them to go could transfer to their teens.
- Since many parents stated that they never missed a dentist's appointment, they suggested that the healthcare provider's office schedule the next appointment automatically when the teen is there, just as the dentist's office would.
- Parents struggled with the concept of taking their healthy teen to the healthcare provider and paying a co-pay. The healthcare provider's office explained that many insurance companies pay for annual well visits without collecting a co-pay, which many parents thought was beneficial information.
- One parent mentioned that taking their teen to a well visit when most other people at the healthcare provider's office are sick could increase the teen's risk of becoming ill. To ensure that their healthy child does not contract an illness during the well visit, parents suggested separating the waiting room into a "well visit side" and a "sick side."
- Teens and parents wanted to see materials that were easy to read with large, bold font. They did not want to be overwhelmed or overloaded by words. They liked color, bullet points, and information that was presented in subcategories.
- Both teens and parents identified social media, Facebook, banners, and the waiting room or exam rooms in the healthcare provider's office as possible places for posters/materials. Parents also suggested radio ads, Google, WebMD, and parenting magazines as other venues for learning more about adolescent well visits.
- Teens wanted messages to come from other teens and celebrities that were smiling, happy and "laid back." They wanted to see the benefits of a checkup in materials that grabbed people's attention.



"It's probably a lot of information, I just wouldn't take the time to read that."